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THE THREE ROMANCES;

OR

Love, with an Artistic Interpretation.



MONG the many passions which have exercised a powerful influence in the ever-varying and romantic world of artist-life, that of Love occupies a prominent place. Many a strange adventure and hairbreadth escape, many an instance of constancy and devotion, many a successful struggle and development of genius, and—alas! that it should also beset—many a fatal error and degradation of the highest gifts, may be traced to its resistless power. But, upon the whole, its influence upon Art seems to have been beneficial. It has exalted far oftener than debased; and, if it has occasionally urged to crime, or steeped the spirit in sloth or sensuality, it has more frequently stimulated to active, persevering, and meritorious exertions. It may be said to have created three painters, who, but for its promptings, might have lived and died unknown; and, although the spheres of their labors lay far apart, Italy claiming one, Spain another, and Holland the third, there is a remarkable similarity in their histories, which we propose briefly to chronicle for the entertainment of our readers.

The first of these artists—Antonio Solario, surnamed *Lo Zingaro*—was born in 1382, at Civita, near Chieti, in the Abruzzi. He was originally a blacksmith, or rather a tinker, and exercised this calling until seventeen years of age, when a romantic incident induced him forever to abandon it. He had gone to Naples to prosecute his trade, was one day summoned to repair some kitchen utensils, and, while engaged in doing so, was struck by the beauty of a young female, the daughter of the painter Colantonio del Fiore. The result was that he fell violently in love with her; and, in spite of his servile occupation, had the audacity to aspire to her hand. His pretensions at first amused Colantonio; but, as he continued to press his suit, he at length told him that his daughter should only become the wife of a painter. Nothing daunted by this declaration, Solario asked and obtained ten years to perfect himself as an artist; and, inspired by

love, betook himself to the study of design with the utmost ardor. Anxious to obtain the instruction of a good master, he repaired to Bologna, and became the pupil of Lippo Dalmasio—also called Lippo delle Madonne, from his numerous pictures of the Virgin, and the grace with which they were painted. Under Lippo he studied for seven years, and then—that nothing might be left undone to obtain the hand of his lady-love—left his studies and traveled over Italy, studying everywhere the works of the greatest painters and comparing them with his own efforts. He visited Venice, Florence, Ferrara, and Rome; and at length, when convinced of his own powers, returned to Naples, and, concealing his name, offered himself to paint the portrait of the queen. In this he succeeded so well that he considered himself entitled to go to Colantonio and demand the fulfilment of his promise. He was warmly welcomed, and received as the reward of his long and strenuous efforts, the hand of her whose love had originated and supported them. The love which he had conceived in a day made him a painter forever, and he became one of the first artists of his time. His romantic history, as well as his merits, contributed to spread his fame, and he was soon one of the most popular artists of Naples. Both the Benedictines and Dominicans employed him to decorate their convents; and in a picture which he painted for the canons of the Lateran, he has introduced his own portrait and that of his wife, in the midst of a group of saints which surround the Virgin. Like Angelico, and many of the earlier Italian painters, Solario was distinguished for his skill in illuminating. In this way he decorated the pages of several Bibles, and a MS. of Seneca's tragedies, which may still be seen in the possession of the Fathers of Oratory at Naples. Solario is distinguished for the beautiful expressions of his heads, the freshness of his coloring, and the animation of his figures. He also composed with much skill; but the hands and feet of his figures are frequently defective in drawing. He was the founder of a distinguished school of art at Naples. His finest works are the frescoes in the choir of San Severino, representing in several compartments the life of St. Benedict, and containing an incredible variety of figures and subjects. In spite of four centuries of neglect, these

frescoes still preserve something of their pristine beauty. They are especially remarkable for the important part which the landscape occupies. At Naples, as elsewhere in Italy, landscape was originally introduced in the fifteenth century, as a mere accessory to religious painting; and at first it was not imitated from nature, but borrowed from the school of the Van Dycks at Bruges; and the most important examples of this early practice of landscape now existing in Naples are those frescoes of Solario, which are thus described by a recent observer: "Nature and the creations of men are, however, here represented, not in their sober reality, but in fabulous combinations, which are singularly appropriate to the legends with which they are associated. Here you have a portrait of whatever is most savage or most splendid in a fantastic world; deserts peopled with anchorites and demons; of porticoes, palaces, and convents, the abodes of princes and prelates; of places of temptation, and places of pleasure and disport; of lakes and winding rivers, which reflect the enchanted castles on their cultivated banks, or the beasts of the chase, which approach to drink in the limpid and solitary waters."

The scene now changes from Italy to Spain, and there also we shall find one of her best painters owing his inspiration to the influence of love. Francisco di Ribalta was born about the middle of the sixteenth century, at Castelon de la Plana, and studied painting in Valencia. While prosecuting his studies he fell deeply in love with the daughter of his master, and his affection was returned with equal ardor; but at this time the young artist gave but small promise of future excellence, and his master refused to permit his daughter to marry one for whose abilities he entertained but little respect. The lady, however, was willing to wait; and the young Ribalta departed for Italy, determined to strain every nerve to obtain her hand. We have no account of his studies there; but his style in after years shows that he must have attentively studied the works of the Caracci and of Raphael. He remained in Italy for three or four years, and then returned to Valencia an accomplished artist and constant lover. His first care was to obtain an interview with her who had waited and hoped so long; and then, taking advantage of the absence of her

father, he proceeded to give proof of his matured powers by finishing a picture which had been left on the easel. The father of his lady-love, on returning home, was equally astonished and delighted at the beauty of the finished work, and declared to his daughter that this should be his son-in-law, and not that "dauber Ribalta." The result may easily be imagined: the lovers were soon made happy, and Ribalta's after career justified the promise of this early effort. Commissions poured in upon him, and the churches and convents of Valencia were soon filled with his paintings, as his industry was equal to his genius. He died at Valencia in January, 1628, and was buried in the church of San Juan del Mercapo. His works are remarkable for power and freedom of drawing, and for skillful grouping and composition, while the best of them are equally admirable in color; and Mr. Sterling tells us that on one of his pictures being taken to Italy, and submitted to the judgment of an eminent Italian master, he immediately exclaimed, "*O, divino Raffaello!*" mistaking it for a work by that immortal artist. The Museum of Valencia contains some fine specimens of the works of Ribalta—the best of which is a large picture of "Our Lady of Sorrows." Like Solario, Ribalta formed many excellent painters, the principal of whom were his own son Juan and Josef Ribera, afterwards the head of the Neapolitan school, and the great rival and opponent of the followers of the Caracci.

The third of these love-created artists was Quentin Matsys, so well known in England by his celebrated picture of "The Misers" in Windsor Castle. He was born at Antwerp, in 1450, and, his father dying early, supported himself and his mother by exercising the trade of a blacksmith until his twentieth year, when he was seized with a severe and dangerous illness, which disabled him from following his occupation, and nearly proved fatal to him. When somewhat recovered from the violence of this attack, he undertook to supply an iron cover for a well near the Castle of Antwerp; and, in the execution of this work, displayed great ability, both in the beauty, delicacy, and high finish of the workmanship, and in the good taste of the ornaments with which he decorated it. For the college of Louvain he also made an iron balustrade, remarkable for

its beauty. But the exertion required for these labors proved too much for his recently recovered strength, and brought on a relapse of his malady, which put a stop to all work requiring severe manual labor. It was then the custom that, in a certain annual religious procession, the penitents should distribute to the people little figures of saints designed for the purpose; and a friend, who knew Matsys' skill in drawing, suggested to him that he might employ himself in fabricating these, as a work well suited to his weak state of health. With this advice Matsys complied, and with such success, that he was induced to apply himself steadily to the study of painting, and abandon forever the trade of a blacksmith. Such is the narrative given by Van Mander of the conversion of the blacksmith of Antwerp into one of the most successful artists of his time. But there is another and far more interesting and romantic account of his reasons for abandoning the hammer for the pencil, supported, also, by strong evidence, and which, as a beautiful episode in the history of art, we would wish to believe the true one. Under his portrait are certain verses by Lampsonius which impute his conversion to the influence of love; and upon his tomb in the Cathedral of Antwerp, engraved in letters of gold, is the inscription: "*Connubialis amor de mulcibre ferit Apellem.*" According to this account, Matsys fell in love with the daughter of an Antwerp painter, who was not insensible to his attachment, but whose flinty-hearted father, regardless of the affection of two young hearts, refused to give his consent to her marriage with a blacksmith, and declared that none but a painter should take her for a wife. Matsys was young and hopeful, and he was also deeply in love: he therefore applied himself to the study of design with the utmost diligence, and when he considered himself qualified to compete with his rivals for the fair hand of his mistress, carried one of his paintings to her father, who, charmed with its beauty, no longer refused his consent. This love-story has been made the subject of a comedy by M. Maurice Seguiet, which was successfully performed at the theatre of the Vaudeville, in 1799, under the title of "*Marechal ferrant de la Ville d'Anvers.*" We are certain that all our fair readers will believe the portrait, the tomb, and the comedy, in spite of Van Mander,

Descamps, Bryant, and their dull, musty histories and dictionaries of art. A mere fit of illness could never turn a sooty, horny-fisted blacksmith into an accomplished painter; nothing but love could work such a miracle. At all events, if the story is not true, it ought to be so.

Matsys died at Antwerp, in 1529, at the advanced age of seventy-nine. He never visited Italy; and his pictures, though remarkable for minute and careful finish, are cold and dry in manner. They were, however, highly esteemed, even in his own time, and brought very large prices.

Such is the history of three celebrated artists, who owed their own fame and immortality to the influence of love; and one cannot fail to be struck with the remarkable similarity in the principal incidents of their lives—the story of the "Blacksmith of Antwerp," being almost identical with that of him of the Abruzzi, while Ribalta's, though a little different from both, has yet a singular resemblance in its main features. But, interesting and romantic as are the lives of these painters, they are all exceeded, in variety of adventure, and constancy of purpose, by the career of Francisco Vieira, one of the few great artists of whom Portugal can boast. He cannot, indeed, be said to have been made a painter by the power of love; but still it exercised so important an influence on his life, and stamped upon it so completely its character of singularity and romance, that his story may, with great propriety, be included under the title of "Love and Painting." He was born in Lisbon, in 1699, and, while quite a boy, contracted a warm friendship for a young girl, named Ignês Elena de Lima, the daughter of a noble family, which later in life ripened into a strong, enduring, and mutual attachment. This boyish love was interrupted for a time, by a visit which Vieira made to Rome, in the suite of the Marquis of Abrantes, ambassador to the Holy See. At the time of this visit, he appears to have been only nine or ten years of age. At Rome, he labored diligently in the study of design for nearly seven years, and, when not quite sixteen years old, obtained the first prize in the Academy of St. Luke. He studied in the school of Trevisani, and improved his skill by copying the works of Annibal Caracci, in the Farnese Palace. On his return to Portugal, in spite of his extreme youth, he was commissioned by the king to paint

a large picture on the Mystery of the Eucharist, which he completed in six days, in such a way as entirely to satisfy his royal patron, who further employed him upon a portrait of himself, to be used as a model for the coin-dies in the mint. But the favor of the king could not make Vieira forget his early playmate, and he lost no time in repairing to the mansion of the Lima family, on the beautiful banks of the Tagus, where he was kindly received by the parents of Ignez, who never for a moment dreamed, that a painter could aspire to mix his plebeian blood with the *sangre azul* that flowed in the veins of the Limas. For a time, therefore, everything went happily, and Vieira spent his days in courting his not unwilling mistress, and in sketching the beautiful scenery around him. At length, however, the parents of the fair Ignez became aware of the monstrous fact, that the youthful artist had not only wooed, but won the heart of their daughter, and they lost no time in banishing him from their house, and shutting Ignez up in a convent. John V., the then reigning monarch of Portugal, had a fancy for choosing his mistresses from convents, and Vieira, thinking that he might have a sympathy with his case, lost no time in throwing himself at the foot of the throne, and entreating that the compulsory vows which Ignez had been compelled to take might be canceled, in consideration of the prior faith which she had sworn to himself. His application, however, was vain. The king probably thought, that the nuns ought to be a royal privilege, and refused to interfere in favor of a subject. Nothing daunted by this repulse, the enamored painter proceeded to Rome, and succeeded in obtaining from the Pope a commission directed to the Patriarch of Lisbon, requiring him to investigate the facts of the case; and the report of this prelate being in favor of Vieira, he was at length made happy by a papal bull, annulling the conventional vows of the fair Ignez, and authorizing her marriage with her lover. But here an unseen obstacle presented itself. The painter had neglected to obtain the approbation of the civil power in Portugal previously to prosecuting his suit in Rome, causing a delay for six years longer, until the affair should be forgotten in Lisbon. During this period he was elected a member of the Academy of St. Luke, and was a popular and well-employed artist. At

the expiration of the six years, he returned to Portugal, to claim and wed the bride for whom he had waited so long, and ventured so much. He found her still confined in the Convent of Santa Anna, and jealously watched by her relations. But Vieira was not a man to be daunted by difficulties or dangers: disguised as a bricklayer, he obtained access to the convent, and mingling with the workmen, he contrived to obtain an interview with Ignez, and communicated to her a plan of escape, which he afterwards successfully carried out, bearing his lady off on horseback, and disguised in male attire. The lovers were, however, closely pursued, and Vieira was wounded by a pistol-shot fired by the brother of Ignez, an injury which he afterwards avenged by generously relieving his wants when reduced to a state of beggary. On escaping from their pursuers, and reaching another bishopric, Vieira produced another papal dispensation, and he and Ignez were at last married. Their union, so often deferred, was long and happy, enduring for forty-five years. Vieira afterwards resided from some time at Seville, and was subsequently employed by the king of Portugal, in the decoration of the vast convent-palace of Mafra, and appointed painter in ordinary, with a liberal salary. He was by far the best native artist, and resided for nearly forty years in the capital, painting with much assiduity and success. Many of his works perished in the great earthquake of 1755, but some of the best escaped. He was a distinguished architect, and a competent engraver, as well as a skillful painter; and after the death of his beloved Ignez, which took place in 1775, he beguiled his grief by writing and publishing, at Lisbon, in 1780, a poetical autobiography, bearing the somewhat pompous and arrogant title of the "Distinguished Painter and Constant Husband." Upon the death of his wife, he gave up painting, and spent most of his time in a retreat called Beato Antonio, in the exercise of meditation and prayer, dying at Lisbon, in 1783, at the age of eighty-four, "with good men's praises for his epitaph," and a high reputation for charity and devotion.

— There are some lessons which adversity will be sure to teach us, and among others this—that goodness in a woman is more admirable than personal beauty.

ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA.

BY WM. H. LYTLE.

"*I am dying, Egypt, dying.*"—SHAKESPEARE.

I AM dying, Egypt, dying,
Ebbs the crimson life-tide fast,
And the dark Plutonian shadows
Gather on the evening blast.
Let thine arm, oh! Queen, support me,
Hush thy sobs and hush thine ear,
Listen to the great heart secrets
Thou, and thou alone, must hear.

Though my scarred and veteran legions
Bear their eagles high no more,
And my wrecked and scattered galleys
Strew dark Actium's fatal shore:
Though no glittering guards surround me,
Prompt to do their master's will,
I must perish like a Roman—
Die the great triumvir still.

Let not Caesar's servile minions
Mock the lion thus laid low;
'Twas no foeman's arm that felled him,
'Twas his own that struck the blow.
Hear then, pillowed on thy bosom,
Ere his star shall veil its ray,
Him who, drunk with thy caresses,
Madly threw the world away.

Should the base plebeian rabble
Dare assail my fame at Rome,
Where the noble spouse, Octavia,
Weeps within her widowed home,
Seek her: say the Gods have told me—
Altars, augurs, circling wings—
That her blood, with mine commingled,
Yet shall mount the throne of Kings.

And for thee, star-eyed Egyptian!
Glorious Sorceress of the Nile,
Light the path to Stygian horrors
With the splendors of thy smile.
Give the Cæsar crown and arches,
Let his brow the laurel twine,
I can scorn the Senate's triumphs,
Triumphing in love like thine.

I am dying, Egypt, dying,
Hark! the insulting foeman's cry:
They are coming—quick, my falchion!
Let me front him ere I die.
Ah! no more amid the battle
Shall my heart exulting swell,
Isis and Osiris guard thee—
Cleopatra! Rome! farewell!

BIRDS.

BIRDS are singing round my window,
Tunes the sweetest ever heard;
And I hang my cage there daily,
But I never catch a bird!

So with thoughts my brain is peopled,
And they sing there all day long;
But they will not hold their pinions
In the little cage of song.